



**▲ Gleaming Clean.** Sgt. Richard Honig's image shines on the gleaming skin of the helicopter as he inspects the brake lines during a preflight inspection. Since they normally carry VIPs, cleanliness inside and outside the helicopters is extremely important, the CH46 crew chief said. Marines spend numerous hours before and after flights cleaning every nook and cranny. Clean ups are so detailed, Marines even use window cleaner to wipe down the outside of the aircrafts, including the exhaust areas.

*Photo by Staff Sgt. Cindy Fisher*

# FROM EXPERIMENTAL Premiere Unit Paves Way for Helos in Corps To PRESIDENTIAL



**T**elevision crews check their equipment and reporters review their questions. The scene, back-dropped by the White House, is one of controlled confusion as each individual in the media mob scrambles for the best spot, the best view. Security personnel prowl the perimeter to ensure all is safe; there are no threats. Then, the rhythmic thump of its rotor blades slices through the crowd's chatter causing a momentary quiet. A swirl of wind precedes the approaching helicopter causing hands to clutch hats, notepads and equipment. Every eye is intently focused on Marine One as it lands on the South Lawn. The craft lands and a Marine, clean-cut and immaculate in dress blues, steps forth from within. He opens the aircraft's doors and all attention shifts to the man emerging from the helicopter, the President of the United States. Marine One is once again forgotten — until the next time it transports the Commander-in-Chief.

**▲ On Call for Quantico.** As the only air asset at Marine Corps Base Quantico, the pilots and crews of HMX-1's green side provide air support to the Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Marine Corps Systems Command, Officer Candidate School and The Basic School. Missions include everything from external load certification — picking up external loads for the first time and developing the correct procedures — to basic Marine Corps training like troops inserts.

*Photo by Staff Sgt. Cindy Fisher*





➤ **Tan-Belt Qualified.** Gunnery Sgt. Alexander Colonna, the squadron gunnery sergeant, supervises as Cpl. Justin T. Morgan struggles to break Cpl. Leon Hardy's grip on his neck during a recent Martial Arts Program tan belt class. Despite its high-visibility mission, hectic operational tempo and a demanding maintenance regimen, HMX-1 Marines make the time to complete traditional training such as rifle qualifications, swim qualifications and even MCMAPs. "By the end of fiscal year 2003, we hope to have trained 723 Marines (to be tan-belt qualified)," said Colonna.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Cindy Fisher



**Looking for the Cream of the Crop**

The squadron is always searching the aviation community for "the best of the best" who are interested in joining the premiere helicopter squadron in the Corps. If interested:

- Contact the unit's S-1 at (703) 784-3297 or
- Apply online at <https://www.hmx-1.usmc.mil/s-1/index.htm> or
- Visit with your MMEA coordinator.

Selections are made once a year by HMX-1 and HQMC.

Comparisons of Squadrons*		
	HMX-1	Average Squadron
Rank of Pilots	major	captains
Average age	Mid-30s	Early 30s
Number of prior duty stations	2-3	1-2
Yearly flight hours per pilot	250-300	210**
Personnel	700	
Number of different aircraft flown in squadron	5	1
Number of pilots in squadron	70	35
Number of helos in which pilots are proficient	3	1

\* The chart compares averages, not exact figures.

\*\* Average is for all T/M/S aircraft from 1997-2001.



FROM  
EXPERIMENTAL  
TO PRESIDENTIAL

Marine One is the most recognized, yet least known helicopter in the Marine Corps. It isn't even a single aircraft, but a designation for a Marine Corps helicopter when it flies the president. The helicopters and crews that serve as Marine One are actually part of Marine Helicopter Squadron One, which is based at Marine Corps Air Facility Quantico. While HMX-1 is the only helicopter unit assigned to transport the president, this is not its only mission or even the reason for its existence.

The oldest helicopter squadron in the Corps, it was established in 1947 to pioneer an entirely new concept in

amphibious operations—transporting Marines to the beach head in helicopters. From this, the squadron has evolved into the operational test activity for new helicopter systems and products designed for the Marine Corps. The Operational Test and Evaluation Department keeps the X—for experimental—in HMX-1, according to Maj. Matthew McLuckie, the assistant chief operational test director. "We are a vital part of the acquisition process for acquiring new gear for helicopter assets. We test it from big to small, from the V-22 to the new seat cushions of the CH-46." HMX-1 has been involved in the testing of every

helicopter used in the Corps. Currently its largest test project is the MV-22 Osprey.

Established for the 'X' in 1947, it wasn't until ten years later that the squadron began what is now its most recognizable mission, providing helicopter support to the president. Before Marine One, to get from his summer home in Newport, R.I., to Washington, President Dwight D. Eisenhower had to endure an hour-long ferry ride across Narragansett Bay to Air Force One, followed by a 45-minute flight to Andrews Air Force Base, Md., and a 20-minute motorcade to the White House. Sept. 7, 1957,



**Marine One.** Since 1957, the Marines of HMX-1 have flown Marine One and helped the president get where he needs to go. This mission requires a large support detail that is not part of a typical squadron. Marines in security, supply, administration, communication and medical personnel are part of HMX-1. This has swelled the squadron's ranks to more than 700, making it the largest squadron in the Corps. "Because of the additional support personnel, this squadron is the size of a small (Marine Air Group)," said Maj. Robert Kimbrell, a recent addition to HMX-1.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Cindy Fisher







#### A **Maintenance, Maintenance.**

Lance Cpl. Matt A. Cherry, a 20-year-old CH53 crew chief, unscrews the bolts from an access panel. The New Bern, N.C., native is removing the panel so he can inspect the interior of the sponson.

*Photo by Staff Sgt. Cindy Fisher*



A **Same Gear, Different Mission.** CH53 crew chiefs Cpl. Michael Ross, a 20-year-old native of Newport, R.I., and Staff Sgt. Richard W. Ide, a 27-year-old from Pelzer, S.C., begin a preflight inspection of CH53 #31. Working on the green side of the compound prepares them for the switch to the white side. "This is HMX-1, I expected it to be brand new helos and facilities. But it's not. It's the same gear and facilities as used by the rest of the Corps," Ide said. "We just lift a lot more important people like VIPs."

*Photo by Staff Sgt. Cindy Fisher*

## FROM EXPERIMENTAL TO PRESIDENTIAL



President Eisenhower, whose presence was urgently required in Washington, needed a faster way to the Oval Office. An HMX-1 UH-34, on Rhode Island for emergencies, was diverted for the president's use. The seven-minute flight set a precedent for presidential flight duties that was initially shared with the Army. In 1976, the Marine Corps assumed sole responsibility for providing helicopter support to the president worldwide. HMX-1's Executive Flight Detachment also provides support for the Vice President of the United States, the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of the Navy, visiting heads of states as directed by the

White House, the Chief of Naval Operations and, of course, the Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Denizens of the detachment affectionately refer to their compound as the "cage" for the fence separating it from the rest of HMX-1 and the "white side" for the paint scheme of its aircraft, which is green on bottom, white on top. Assignment to the cage is the pinnacle to which most of the unit's aircrew and pilots aspire. "The Marines who fly with the president operate in a very demanding environment where failure is not an option," said Col. Steve P. Taylor, commanding officer. What makes this task even more

daunting is that HMX-1 is the only Marine Corps unit to operate VH3s and VH60s, the craft that make up the executive fleet. Most Marine Corps pilots concentrate on only one craft during their careers, he said.

"That is one of the most unique challenges at HMX-1, learning to fly a new craft, then going from one air frame to another," said Maj. Timothy "Toolman" Fetsch, one of the pilots who has earned the right to pilot Marine One. "But it does get easier over time."

Which is why tours at HMX-1 are four years long. Marines are screened for approval before they are accepted

to the unit. Then they spend at least a year on the "green side" learning maintenance procedures and practicing what they learn while waiting for their "Yankee White" clearance, an in-depth security screening every Marine who comes into contact with the president must undergo. If a Marine cannot get YW clearance, he is soon rotated to a new duty station. "From the day they get to the green side, we are preparing them for possible work in the cage," Taylor said. Some never leave the green side, which maintains the CH53s and CH46s that support the Marine Corps Combat Development Command, provide other VIP support

and conduct operational test and evaluation flights. A select few, after lots of hard work, earn the title Marine One Crew Chief. For these Marines the name of the game is maintenance, maintenance and then more maintenance. "Our helicopters are the most meticulously maintained aircraft in the world. They are flying the President of the United States," Taylor said.

That's a lot of responsibility for a Marine, said Sgt. Daniel N. Senn, a Marine One crew chief for the VH3. "I'm the one responsible for inspecting the president's helicopter and if I miss something, the consequences

could be huge. Having that responsibility is tough."

For pilots, attaining the Marine One status is equally tough. They spend three years learning and acquiring flight hours before they are even considered. Of the 70 pilots with the squadron, only 5 are Marine One pilots. "Not all pilots are selected to be Marine One pilot. But, every pilot gets the opportunity to fly as a co-pilot for the president," Fetsch said. "And to be a part of that, in any way at all, is extremely motivating." **M**

